Statement of Chairman Peter G. Fitzgerald
Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce, and Tourism
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mad Cow Disease is back in the news. Although reports of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or BSE, are down significantly in Great Britain—where the disease peaked in 1993 with an estimated 1,000 cases per week—other European countries once thought immune to the disease are now reporting cases of BSE. The spread of the disease throughout Europe invites our reexamination of the measures in place in the United States to prevent transmissible animal diseases. Additionally, we have recently witnessed graphic images of the mass slaughter of animals in Britain to control the latest outbreak of foot and mouth disease—a blight unrelated to BSE. Some consumers apparently do not distinguish between foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease, and other questions are arising as well.

Beginning in 1988, our government—through the United States Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, and various other agencies—has employed a number of different measures to safeguard the American public from BSE. And as *Newsweek* reported earlier this month, "The United States, to its credit, has shown foresight...Not a single mad cow has been reported in this country." Let me repeat that again, *Newsweek* recently reported that "Not a single mad cow has been reported in this country."

In addition to the preventive measures adopted by regulation—and the vast ocean that separates us from Europe—initiatives within industry and differences between the way the U.S. and Europe traditionally feed and slaughter cattle may help the United States remain BSE-free. We hope to examine some of these initiatives and differences today.

But while the risks may be low, **we cannot be complacent**. The recent focus on BSE has invited examination of our defenses.

By 1988, researchers in Britain knew that their cattle faced a deadly epidemic. They had identified BSE as a neurological disease, thought that it was probably transmitted through cattle feed derived from animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats, and knew that thousands of cattle may have consumed contaminated feed. To date, there have been over 170,000 cases of BSE reported in Europe, the vast majority of them in Great Britain.

At the hearing today, this subcommittee will examine the nature of the disease, as well as the measures taken in this country to prevent the disease's establishment and spread in the United States.

Concerns have also been raised about our primary efforts to keep the infection out of the country. The effectiveness of our import prohibitions is also an issue we will explore.

This subcommittee would like answers to some very basic questions:

A) What is BSE?
B) How much do we know?
C) Who are the experts in the field?
D) How do they assess the risk?
E) Should consumers be concerned?
F) What are we doing to prevent BSE?
G) Should we be doing more?

By examining these issues publicly, it is our hope to help answer questions posed by consumers. As former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman wrote in response to a recent magazine article on BSE, the American public is far more likely to be affected by salmonella, E-coli, or listeria than by BSE. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about whether they agree with that statement, whether our defenses are in place, and whether there is anything further we need to do.

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